

## Essays and Contributions.

### CHURCH LITERATURE.

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Previous to the National Convention of 1892 held at Warsaw, Ind., there had been some little, desultory, individual effort, to publish a literature representing the Brethren church, but no organized effort of the church as a body. Why this important work had been so long neglected it is not our province to explain, but it was probably because of the strictly congregational form of government prevailing in the church, the infrequency of National Conventions, and the almost total lack of concentration and organization which these premises imply. We went to that Convention perhaps too much imbued with the idea that in this lack of concentration and organization lay a great weakness of the church. At any rate certain proposals which we made there looking to a more compact and efficient working organization were, after a most animated debate, rejected by a small majority. The very large minority vote unmistakably indicated so strong a sentiment in favor of the general principles of my proposition that we resolved at once to effect in detail if possible, some of its more important practical suggestions, and therefore at the earliest opportunity introduced a resolution for the appointment of a committee to draft a plan for the publication of an authorized church literature, including Sunday school literature and doctrinal tracts. Being nominated on this Committee by the courtesy of the Moderator, it fell to my task to draft the plan which was presented to the Convention, and finally adopted by it, constituting the "BRETHREN'S BOOK AND TRACT COMMITTEE."

The operations of this Committee, of which we have the honor to be a member, have been remarkably successful. Without any previous experience, and without a dollar of capital, it has in the short time which has elapsed since its inauguration, published and distributed a full line of Sunday school literature of its own, now regularly issued weekly and quarterly to all or nearly all of the Sunday schools of the Brotherhood,

and to many outside of the Brotherhood. The edition of quarterlies for the last or present quarter amounted to 9,000, and the circulation of the weekly papers amounts to 4,000. The quality of this work is second to none, and the price as low as the best. This gigantic task has been accomplished through the indefatigable labors and able management of Rev. A. D. Gnagey of Meyersdale, Pa., who is the chairman and editor of the Committee.

Besides the Sunday school literature, the Committee has published many thousands of doctrinal tracts which are being constantly sent out on their mission of "preparing the way," and making "the paths straight" for the evangelist who comes, or ought to come, after, to garner the sheaves which spring from this good seed.

This in brief is the history of our authorized church literature, in the narration of which you will please pardon the several personal references. It is the beginning of a work which, as it is carried on along down the coming years will increasingly produce glorious fruits which will make for righteousness, for the building up of the Brethren church, and the advancement of God's kingdom in the hearts of the many thousands in her fold, and the greater thousands yet to come in.

Many weighty considerations impress the importance of this work, one or two of which we will mention. The position of the Brethren church is distinctly polemical. While we recognize that all the evangelical churches hold in common the fundamental doctrines of salvation, and that all of them exhibit, in greater or less degree, the beautiful fruits of the Holy Spirit, we hold to certain distinctive symbols which seem to us to be enjoined by Christ and his Apostles upon the obedience of Christians, and which illustrate and emphasize some of the most important operations of grace in the hearts of believers, and in the fraternal life of the church. We hold that to neglect a divinely appointed symbol of grace is to miss in large measure the lesson which it teaches, and lose us the help to growth in grace which it was ordained to minister. Aside from this but parallel with it is the other doctrine which we perhaps accentuate

more than any other Christian denomination that an implicit, unquestioning, absolute subjection of our own wills to God's will, implying an undeviating obedience to every divine injunction, without raising questions as to their essentiality or non-essentiality is in itself, in the abstract, so fruitful a means of grace, and so wide a door to the peace of God which passeth understanding, that no Christian can at all afford to do without it.

We have then in these and other considerations of a like nature the argument for a strong distinctive church literature, to be scattered broadcast, everywhere if possible, that it may reach that hungering conscience for just such a doctrine which all our experience as a church teaches us exists everywhere, waiting often through long years, and praying for that light which they are constituted to receive and assimilate into a more satisfying Christian experience, and a more rapid growth in grace.

Our short experience as an organized body has convinced us that the doctrine of the Brethren church intelligently and persistently presented will win its way as rapidly as any other, especially so since we have laid aside the traditional clogs which always prevent progress in any good work. Redoubled efforts should therefore be made by every church, by every evangelist, by every pastor, by every lay member, by every chick and child in the church to double and quadruple the volume and efficiency of our church literature, including the church paper and the Book and Tract Work. Our doctrinal tracts should be sown everywhere like autumn leaves so that they might fertilize the ground of conviction, and bring forth in their season the beautiful spring leaves and spring flowers of the new life. If we are only a little flock let us do our best, and hands many in number shall take up the work where our hands few in number lay it down, and God shall give the increase in the wide fertile field of time, and in the golden harvest of Eternity.

The devil will not care who does the preaching, so long as his plans are adopted for raising the money to run the church.